



State of Delaware



Justice of the Peace Court

WHERE JUSTICE STARTS



Truancy Court Annual Report 2004-2005

Truancy Court



Linking the law with educational, community and clinical interventions to improve student outcomes

Delaware's statewide Truancy Court effectively addresses truancy by meshing appropriate community health and social service supports with intensive court monitoring. This fosters increased parent and student accountability and improved family functioning, thereby leading to more consistent school attendance, improved academic achievement and a reduction in juvenile delinquency.



The Truancy Court Model

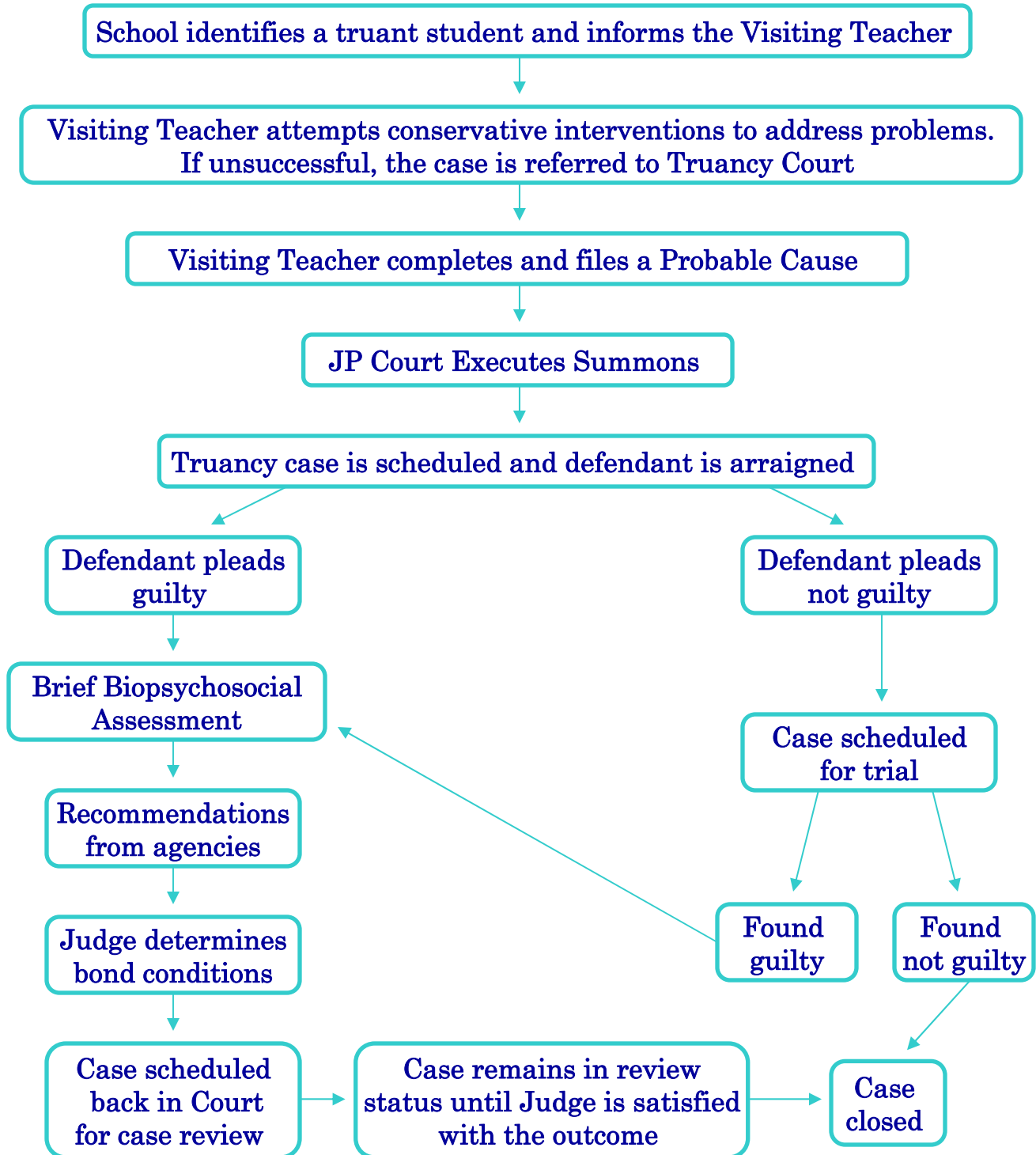
Truancy historically has been a reliable predictor of juvenile delinquency and often is a signal of personal and/or family issues that have gone without appropriate interventions. Some of these issues include homelessness, mental illness, substance abuse, child abuse/neglect, unmet educational needs and limited access to healthcare. Delaware's Truancy Court serves as the hub for the support and intervention services necessary to address these issues, thereby resulting in improved school attendance. Truancy Court is innovative in its remedial, non-punitive approach to improving school attendance, as opposed to the more disciplinary measures of enforcing the law and mandating change seen in traditional court settings. The comprehensive, wrap-around approach to addressing Truancy is evidenced by those present in the courtroom on a typical Truancy day. In addition to the parent and child, the following parties can be on hand:

- Judge trained in handling Truancy cases
- Social worker to assess, query and screen cases
- Behavioral health providers who take referrals, conduct drug testing and schedule assessments
- Educational program partner for scheduling parents for skill building classes
- Youth community center partner to accept referrals to grant-funded truancy reduction program
- Student interns to provide additional case management and community support/outreach

In addition to these partners, Truancy Court works closely with the Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families. The Court maintains contact with active workers through Child Mental Health, Family Services, and Youth Rehabilitative Services in order to make informed decisions, initiate appropriate interventions, and avoid duplication of services.



How a Case Enters Truancy Court






The Truancy Court Partners

For 2004-2005, 1,091 new cases were filed with Truancy Court, compared with 1,140 cases for 2003-2004. Over the same two year span, the Court made 829 behavioral health referrals (492 for 2003-2004 and 337 for 2004-2005). Nearly half of these referrals were for substance abuse treatment, based on drug screening conducted by the Court (955 drug tests administered over two years). The Court's success is contingent on developing a timely and appropriate intervention plan for each case, which calls for a myriad of support services, of which behavioral health is but one piece. Without our community partners, the gains we have made in the battle against truancy since the Court's inception in 1996 would not be possible. The following programs are integral components of the intervention process:

- **Aquila of Delaware** – Adolescent substance abuse assessment and treatment services
- **Boys/Girls Club of Delaware** – Community based support services: social/recreational, academic, vocational
- **Catholic Charities** – Mental health treatment services for children and adults
- **Child Advocates of Delaware** – Intensive case management/intervention for specially-identified, high-risk youth
- **Child, Inc.** – Parent education classes, groups, and 1:1 intervention
- **Children and Families First** – Mental health treatment services for children and adults
- **Cornell Abraxas** – Electronic monitoring
- **Crossroads of Delaware** – Adolescent substance abuse assessment and treatment services
- **Delaware Guidance Services** - Mental health treatment services for children and adults
- **Delaware State University** – Case management services through the BSW and MSW programs
- **Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families** – Child Mental Health, Youth Rehab. Services and Family Services
- **Family Court** – Processing of Criminal Contempt charges out of Truancy Court



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- **Kent/Sussex County Counseling Services** – Adult substance abuse assessment and treatment services
 - **People’s Place** (KC, SC) – Substance abuse and mental health assessment and treatment services for children and adults
 - **Phoenix Mental Health** (KC, SC) – Substance abuse and mental health assessment and treatment services for children and adults
 - **Project Stay Free** (NCC) – Electronic Monitoring
 - **SODAT** (NCC) – Substance abuse assessment and treatment services for children and adults

The Visiting Teachers

Over the past four years, there have been 3,897 cases filed with Truancy Court. The Visiting Teachers are not only responsible for filing charges with the Court, but also for the ongoing monitoring of attendance and academic performance of each case until closure with Truancy Court. The Visiting Teachers attend arraignments, as well as all subsequent case reviews, serving as the primary source of information for the judges.

In addition, their close monitoring in between reviews allows for swift intervention, should a case deteriorate and require more immediate action by the Court. If Truancy Court is better viewed as a fluid reaction of events, then the Visiting Teachers are the catalysts, precipitating the energy for positive change. But their work begins long before Truancy charges are filed with the Court. The filing of charges against a parent and/or student represents the more aggressive intervention in addressing truancy. Prior to this step, the Visiting Teachers utilize more conservative, but no less vital, measures in an effort to engage parents and students.

These strategies can include face to face meetings with parents, students and school staff (in the home or school), agenda books, attendance contracts, tutoring, transportation assistance, after-school programming, and reviews of special education components.



In summary, the Visiting Teachers use their diverse experiences in education, counseling, social work, and administration to comprehensively assess cases and identify not only the obstacles to regular attendance, but also the solutions. It is only after their considerable efforts have proven ineffective that they bring a case to Truancy Court. It is important that their community outreach efforts are recognized. The following is a list of the Visiting Teachers whose value to the process cannot be measured:

NEW CASTLE COUNTY

Appoquinimink

Eunice Woodard-Deputy
Jacqueline Wade
Dawn Hall

Brandywine

David Brady
Sylvia Rivera-Sorrell

Christina

Thea Scott
Sylvia Manlove
Kathy Covelli-Reyes
Ogechy Nwanekwu
Paula Romeo
Kay Haubois
Perquida Washington
Stacey Heller

Colonial

Ed Guringo

Red Clay

Theresa Marshall
Norma Antongiorggi
Felicia Bennett

Charter/Vo-Tech

Evelyn Edney
Christopher Purnell
Reginald Worlds

KENT COUNTY

Caesar Rodney

Jacqueline Young

Capital

Dr. Geraldine Jones

Lake Forest

Charles Anderson

Smyrna

Rosa Smith

Charter/Vo-Tech

Judy Sinex
Bob Halama

SUSSEX COUNTY

Cape Henlopen

Ida Fitchet

Milford

Heinz Retzlaff

Indian River

Darlene Johnson
Corine Billger

Delmar/Laurel

Jay Green

Seaford

Ron Dickerson

Woodbridge

Sam Wylie



The Truancy Court Judges

A review of the Truancy Court landscape amidst the backdrop of an annual report would not be complete without recognizing the Judges and their contributions to the process. The Truancy Judges presided over nearly 3,800 arraignments and case reviews for 2004-2005. Their specialized training, experience and diverse backgrounds provide for innovative interventions, uniquely nurturing yet authoritative guidance, and insights necessary for serving a wide range of student profiles, from the elementary student with 6 unexcused absences to the 15 year old on Level III-A probation whose days out of school far outnumber those attended. We wish to thank the Truancy Judges for their assiduous efforts on behalf of such a critically at-risk segment of Delaware's student population.

Kent County

Hon. D. Ken Cox
Hon. Pamela Darling
Hon. Frederick Dewey

New Castle County

Hon. Thomas Brown
Hon. Sidney Clark
Hon. Susan Cline
Hon. Rosalind Toulson

Sussex County

Hon. Richard Comly
Hon. William Wood

Looking at the Numbers

A review of the statistics for 2004-2005 shows little change in the statewide number of filings compared with 2003-2004. The 4.3% drop in overall filings represents the smallest change ever from one year to the next, and it is also the first time since Truancy Court's inception that the overall number of filings has actually decreased. While statewide filings are virtually identical to last year, more significant changes can be seen by county, specifically New Castle and Sussex. As Kent County's number of filings is within 1.4% of 2003-2004, New Castle decreased 12.1%, while Sussex increased 19.6%. The following table provides a more thorough break down of the last four years.



Cross Comparison of Case Filings

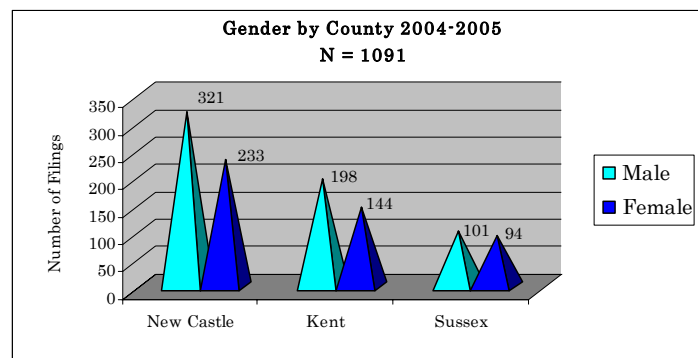
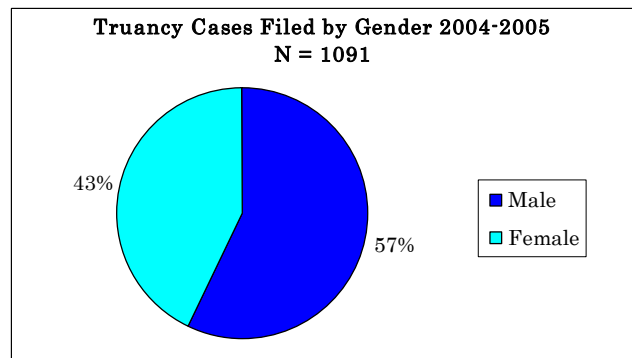
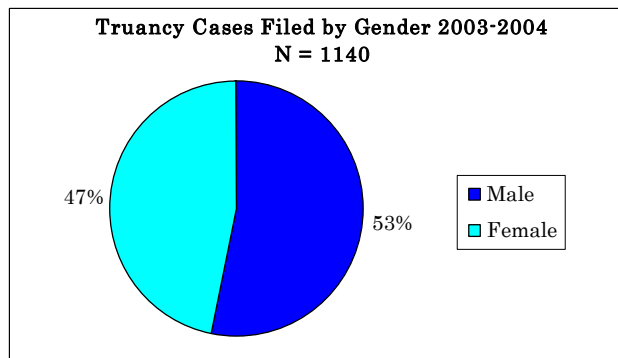
NEW CASTLE COUNTY	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
Appoquinimink	15	9	19	10
Brandywine	48	59	95	76
Christina	234	322	285	260
Colonial	59	60	88	69
Red Clay	96	128	136	134
NCC-Vo-Tech			6	3
Charter Schools			1	2
TOTAL	452	578	630	554
KENT COUNTY	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
Capital	32	67	51	84
Caesar Rodney	42	28	165	119
Lake Forest	17	51	40	47
Smyrna	22	61	89	87
Poly Tech		3	0	2
Charter Schools			2	3
TOTAL	113	210	347	342
SUSSEX COUNTY	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
Cape Henlopen	24	31	25	30
Delmar	26	28	42	14
Indian River	24	37	38	55
Laurel	36	27	18	3
Milford	25	8	17	64
Seaford	9	25	20	17
Woodbridge	5	8	3	12
TOTAL	149	164	163	195
GRAND TOTAL	714	952	1140	1091



Student Demographics

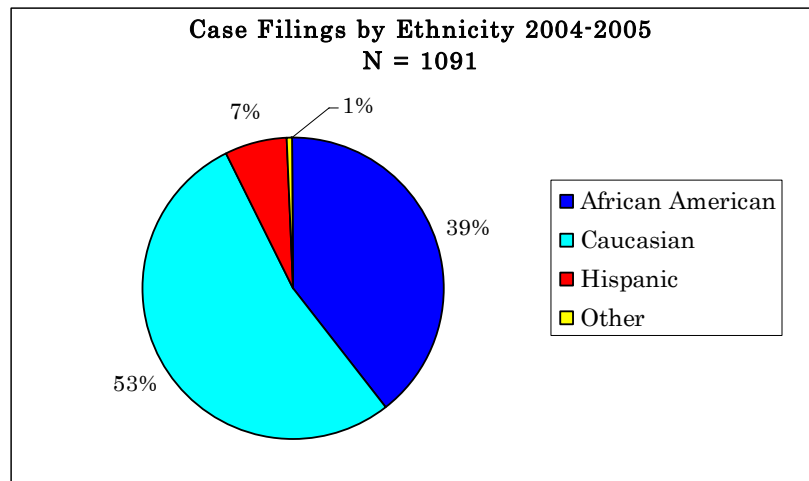
For 2004-2005, cases filed with Truancy Court averaged 12.9 years of age and a grade level of 6.5. These numbers are virtually identical to the data for 2003-2004.

As evidenced below, the gender disparity among cases filed with Truancy Court in 2004-2005 increased 4%. As was true for 2003-2004, male students active with the Court outnumber their female counterparts, even when viewing the data by county.



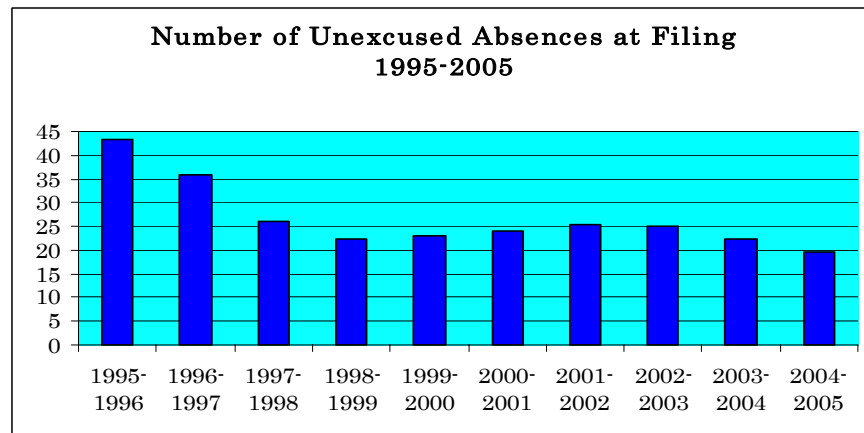
Caucasians remained the largest segment of cases filed with Truancy Court in 2004-2005, increasing 5% from 2003-2004. African-Americans comprised 39% of filings for 2004-2005, compared with 41% in 2003-2004. The percentage of Hispanic filings was unchanged.





Absences at Filing

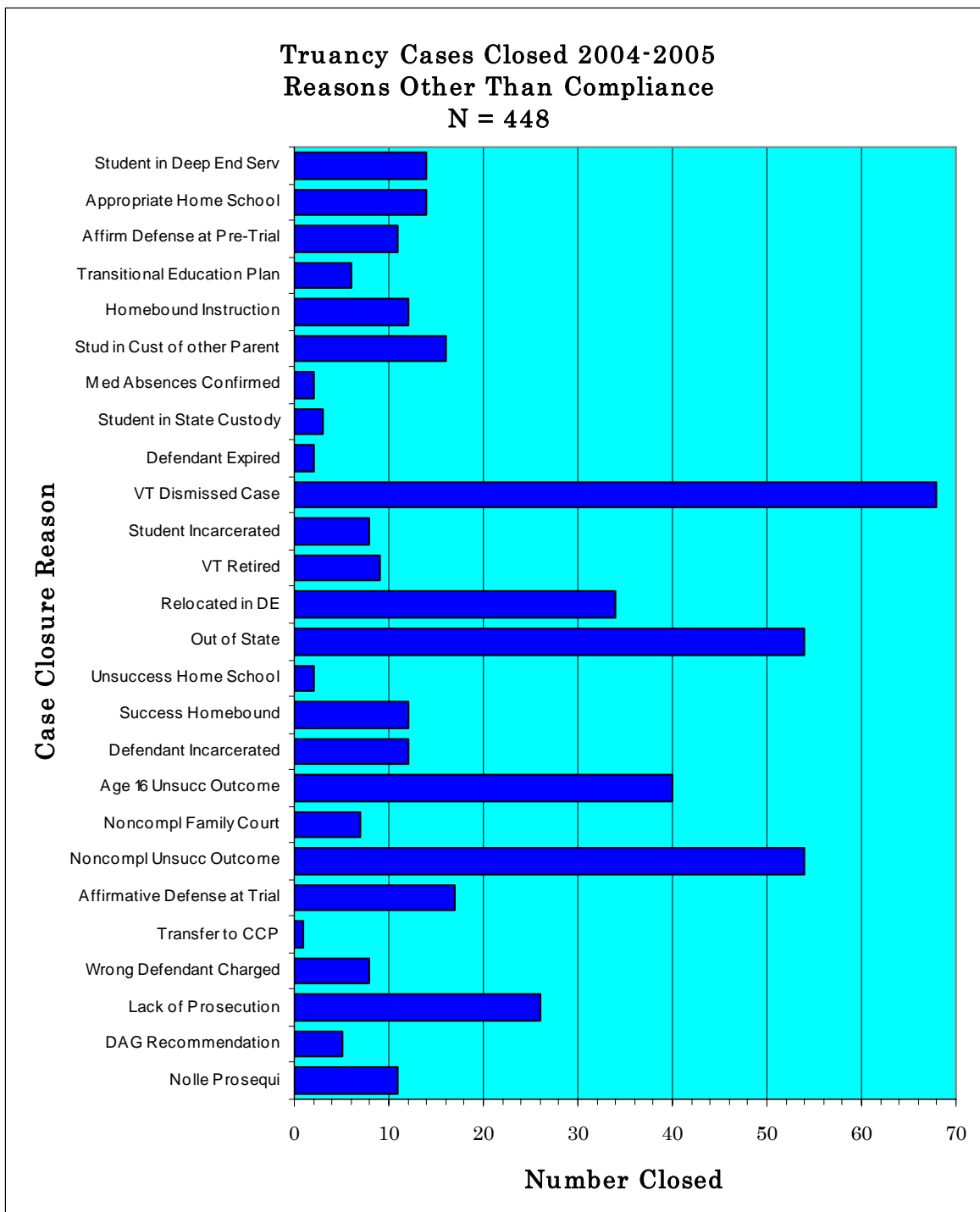
For the first time since Truancy Court's inception, the average number of unexcused absences at filing dropped below 20 (19.7) for 2004-2005. This represents a 12% decrease from 2003-2004 and reflects the Visiting Teachers' intense focus on early intervention.



Case Outcomes/Dispositions

50.8% of cases closed (912) in 2004-2005 achieved compliance with the Court. The remaining 448 cases were dismissed for a variety of other reasons, as depicted in the following graph. While some categories may contain only a handful of cases, this provides for an in-depth look at the wide range of Truancy Court outcomes.







Profiling a Truancy Court Family

The results that are possible through the Truancy Court process can be seen in the case of "Susan", a real-life example of the Court's success in ensuring that students and parents address the causes of a student's failure to attend school. "Susan" is a 15 year old who started skipping school, interacting with a negative peer group, and using marijuana. There had also been a dramatic increase in family conflict in recent months. Prior to this deterioration, "Susan" attended school regularly and received A's and B's in her classes.

As part of the Court's protocol for students in this age group, a drug test was administered at the first court appearance, which was positive for marijuana and amphetamines. Truancy Court's substance abuse treatment partner was present for the arraignment and scheduled "Susan" for an assessment. The provider recommended intensive community based treatment and the Court made the

recommendation part of the Bond Conditions. "Susan's" father was also required to participate in the family component of her treatment. In addition, the Court worked with the school district representative (Visiting Teacher) in an effort to secure an alternative school placement. Finally, a curfew was set by the Court, and the father agreed to increase his level of supervision.

While it was not an easy process for the family, "Susan" and her father addressed the source of their conflict in treatment, and the father became more aware of his daughter's day to day activities. After six months of monitoring through Truancy Court and overcoming many setbacks along the way, "Susan" was discharged successfully with full compliance. She had completed treatment (building substantial clean time), improved her relationship with her father, and was regularly attending an alternative school placement.





Thank You

Among the countless interactions between students and families, Visiting Teachers, Judges, behavioral health providers and community partners, it is easy to forget the people behind the scenes. Those individuals who provide the community outreach, maintain safety in the courtrooms, and process the paperwork for thousands of case events are as vital to the system as any of the aforementioned components. They set the example and a standard of teamwork from which all of us could learn. Without them, the system would surely come to a halt. While it is not possible to adequately express our appreciation for their efforts, it is important to recognize these dedicated colleagues.

New Castle County

Charlotte Walsh, *Court Manager*
Nancy Symonds, *JCP III*
Kim Butler, *JCP II*
Janet Riley, *JCP II*
Shannon Simons, *JCP II*
Vetodis Garnett, *JCP II*
Robin Davis, *JCP II*
Kevin Gains, *Constable*

Sussex County

Larry Waters, *Court Manager*
Kelly Timmons, *JCP II*
William Miller, *Chief of Security*
Richard Baker, *Security*
Brian Barnett, *Constable*
John Wyatt, *Constable*
John O'Day, *Constable*
Terri Vann, *Constable*
Michael Fooks, *Constable*

Kent County

Betty Thompson, *Judicial
Operations Manager*
Ronda Melson, *Court Manager*
Lois Price, *JCP III*
Bonnie Baughn, *JCP II*
Kelly Abbott, *JCP II*
Lori Lewis, *JCP II*
Kenneth Edwards, *JCP II*
Willard Irwin, *JCP II*
Vicky Tibbetts, *JCP II*
Cynthia Eisenbrey, *JCP II*
Dwight Dillard, *JCP II*
Shelley Maloney, *JCP II*
Cynthia Naylor, *JCP I*
Preston Minner, *Chief of Security*
James White, *Security*
Brad Stemrich, *Constable*
James Melvin, *Constable*
Wayne Walls, *Constable*
Frank Fountain, *Constable*
Deron Daniels, *Volunteer*





Resource Information

Recommended reading:

Co-occurrence of Delinquency and Other Problem Behaviors

David Huizinga, Rolf Loeber, Terrence P. Thornberry, and Lynn Cothorn

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Juvenile Justice Bulletin

November 2000

Link: <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/ojjdp/182211.pdf>

School Connectedness – Strengthening Health and Education Outcomes for Teenagers

American School Health Association

Journal of School Health

Volume 74, Number 7

Link: <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/truancy/>

Truancy: First Step to a lifetime of Problems

Eileen M. Garry

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Juvenile Justice Bulletin

October 1996

Link: <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles/truancy.pdf>

Recommended websites:

www.truancyprevention.org

www.dropoutprevention.org

www.iatdp.org

www.childstats.gov

www.ashaweb.org

For more information about Truancy Court, contact:

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